

Notes on Wasps and their Management

Various agencies have received complaints from residents around Buhach Colony High School about the large number of wasps observed around homes and the High School itself. There have been reports from other parts the County as well. UC Cooperative Extension identified one of the species as the western yellow jacket which lives in the soil. Also identified is the dominulus or European paper wasp, which makes paper nests on buildings and in trees and shrubs.

The European paper wasp was not recorded in North America prior to 1981. It has become widely distributed in the U.S. It is smaller than the native northern paper wasp and also makes an upside down paper nest. It was probably inadvertently imported by a traveler or in a shipment. This is why it is very important to observe all laws and rules related to bringing in plant material, furniture and anything else that can harbor the eggs of pests. Biologists are worried that this invasive pest will have a negative effect on other native insects, especially beneficial species.

Paper wasp may hang their nests in plain view but they often prefer to hide them behind or inside objects like a bird house or a bush. One of the best management practices is to close or screen openings into cavities where they can place nests. An effective eradication tool is to wait till dusk and the wasps to return to the nest and then spray the entire nest with a wasp and hornet “bomb” available from a garden or hardware store. Follow the directions carefully. It is less effective to treat the nest during the day when most of the adults are out foraging.

The western yellow jacket lives in the ground which is much more difficult to control. If you observe nesting in an area with bare soil, you can cover it clear plastic at night and seal the edges. During the next few days the soil will get hot enough to kill any pests that reside there – a practice called solarizing. Leave the plastic on for a few weeks. Adding just enough water under the plastic to moisten the soil will hasten the process.

All persons should wear shoes outside. The most common site of bee stings is on the foot. Be very careful when working around bushes that can conceal nests. The yellow jackets are attracted to standing water and wet soil. The fall is time to increase the days between watering so the surface soil can dry out. Increase the days between watering lawns also.

When they are not being a nuisance, most wasps are actually beneficial because they are aggressive predators of a wide variety of insects and spiders. Some species provide some biological control of pests of crops.

A free leaflet on managing wasps and hornets is available from the UC Cooperative Extension office at the corner of Wardrobe and Grogan. Office hours are 8 to Noon and 1 to 5. It is also available on-line. Go to <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu> and enter “wasps” in the ANR search window. There are two publications that can be printed out at no charge.